



Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Department of Children, Youth & Families • Department of Elderly Affairs • Department of Health •
Department of Human Services • Department of Mental Health, Retardation & Hospitals

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Ed Barlow Speaks at Office of Rehabilitation Services Business Summit

Ed Barlow, an internationally known futurist and President of Creating the Future, Inc., spoke to business leaders today on “The Future of Rhode Island Rehabilitation Services: It’s a Journey, not a Destination.” The business summit, held at the Save the Bay Conference Center, brought together presidents, chief executive officers and human resources directors representing 40 companies to promote the benefits of bringing individuals with disabilities into the workforce and to highlight the services and supports the Office of Rehabilitation Services provides to employers as they embark on this journey.

“Vocational rehabilitation programs are one of the best kept secrets in state and federal government,” said Adelita Orefice, Deputy Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. “The programs promote economic self-sufficiency, independence and integration of individuals with disabilities into our society. As former Director of the Department of Labor and Training, I also understand that these programs are an integral part of economic growth and development strategies discussed at the Governor’s Economic Summit yesterday.”

Nationally, more than one million people with disabilities receive services and supports each year from vocational rehabilitation programs. In 2007, 750 individuals with disabilities obtained meaningful employment in Rhode Island businesses with assistance from the Office of Rehabilitation Services. The total earnings for these individuals in the first year alone exceeded \$10.7 million dollars. These individuals were employed in a range of positions from customer service representatives to engineers.

Seventy percent (70%) of individuals with disabilities are not employed. An unemployed individual with a disability costs the state and federal governments an average of \$17,000 each year. Vocational rehabilitation programs have a good return on investment. Studies show that for every dollar spent on vocational rehabilitation, \$5.00 is returned to the tax rolls and an additional \$14.00 to \$18.00 is returned to economy.

“Individuals with disabilities are the largest pool of untapped human resources for businesses,” said Stephen Brunero, Acting Administrator of the Office of Rehabilitation Services. “We are working closely with the business leaders through our Business Advisory Council to get the word out to more businesses across Rhode Island. Working together, we can make sure that individuals have the skills needed to be productive in the workforce.”

Rhode Island is one of the first states in the country to initiate paid internships to companies that hire individuals in the vocational rehabilitation program and to educate employers about the tax benefits employers are eligible for through working with the vocational rehabilitation program (Work Opportunity Tax Credits).

“Working with the Office of Rehabilitation Services has enabled us to hire individuals with disabilities,” said Steve Wing, Director of Governmental Affairs at CVS/Caremark. “CVS/Caremark has participated in several studies that demonstrate that these individuals are excellent employees who make significant contributions in the workplace.”

The Office of Rehabilitation Services is currently focusing on two priority populations – youth with disabilities who are transitioning from school to work and disabled veterans returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the summit, business leaders learned more about these efforts.

CVS/Caremark, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island, Rhodes to Independence, and Every Company Counts partnered with the Office of Rehabilitation Services in sponsoring the business summit.

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